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Book Notes

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BOOK NOTES

RUNNING & FIGHTING: WORKING IN WASHINGTON

By Brett Duval Fromson

New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981. Pp. 204. \$12.95 cloth.

Year after year, a new crop of America's young intellectuals, propelled by lofty ideals and driven by high ambitions, are lured into the web of political intrigue and excitement that is our nation's capital, Washington, D.C. However, in a city where the key to success is not what you know, but rather who you know and how well you can manipulate them, the lofty idealists get trampled and benched; while the ambitious join the power circle of the game players who keep "running and fighting." In the author's own words:

We were a homogeneous group—educated at the better schools and colleges We were stewards to the powerful, their heirs apparent. There were a few thousand other young people in Washington doing the same thing. We helped draft the laws, write the regulations, edit the press releases, and run the public hearings As the barroom toast went, 'we may have come to do good, but we stay to do well.' (p. 42).

Set in the post-Watergate era, Brett Fromson narrates the trials and tribulations of his personal experiences working for the executive and legislative branches of government in a style reminiscent of "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington." Newly graduated from Stanford University and with a job as a staff member for the President's Council on International Economic Policy, the author was determined to join the ranks of the ambitious and become a stellar team player.

Interesting insights of his one year in D.C. cover: organizing hearings for Senators Humphrey and McGovern, drafting legislation, investigating charges of railroad corruption and the Social Security Act, and formulating economic policy. His characters represent the young, wealthy, and well-connected generally found congregating to the centers of power. But ultimately, Brett Fromson found it difficult to subordinate his ideals to his ambitions.

The rules of the game were clear: Put private or bureaucratic interest first, the public interest second. That is how the system works. The notion of a 'coherent system of government' that works to 'represent the people' is malarkey. What the government in Washington provides is service to a heterogeneous group of political constituencies in return for their support (p. 199).

Disillusioned and defeated in his attempt to steal the game ball from

the senior players, idealism wins out and the author drops from the ranks of the ambitious power players.

Running & Fighting provides an enlightening insight on the workings of the U.S. government and the men and women at the helm of power. Brett Fromson sets out to warn young people going to Washington not to be blinded by the power and prestige emanating from the city. The result is an insider's candid view of political Washington from which we can all learn.

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WEBS OF POWER: INTERNATIONAL CARTELS AND THE WORLD ECONOMY

By Kurt Rudolf Mirow and Harry Mauer

Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982. Pp. 242, appendices, index. \$15.95 cloth.

Media publicity has generated numerous debates over the propriety of the actions of large multinational corporations (MNCs) in the international market place. *Webs of Power* will not ignite new and overwhelming public indignation, at least in this country, over the anticompetitive practice of the MNCs. It is basically a documentary of how many MNCs have cooperated to reduce or eliminate their competition, especially in countries which lack the financial resources or the will to establish or maintain native corporations capable of resisting the efforts of the financially secure and highly motivated MNCs. The authors paint a clear and poignant portrait of the cartels formed by these corporations and how these cartels take advantage of the relatively unrestricted international marketplace to increase the influence and economic power of their members at the expense of businesses and consumers, not only in the so-called Third World, but also in the United States and other industrial societies.

Webs of Power is not, however, an emotional tirade against the evils of capitalism or a mere platform for the authors to state their disdain for the industrialized countries which reap revenues from the illgotten gains of the MNCs. This is a well written examination of how international cartels are organized and how they operate, and a factual account of their effect upon smaller businesses and the ultimate consumers of their goods. For example, in discussing the "real" oil cartel, the authors do not restrict themselves to an explanation of how the multinational oil companies dominate the world's energy resources, but also examine the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its influence on the practices of the oil companies.

Webs of Power is effective as an historical examination of international cartels. The book does not, however, support the authors' conclusion that, while no effective international policy to control the MNCs is foreseeable in the immediate future, the increasing power of the cartels formed by the MNCs will hasten a "transnationalization of politics," thereby reducing the ability of corporations based in countries with less restrictive antitrust laws to profit at the expense of countries with more restrictive legislation. The authors seem to envision pressure from consumers and businessmen to establish more uniform international standards of conduct similar to the pressure brought by these groups at the turn of the century to enact stronger federal antitrust laws.

The flaw in this apparent analogy is the vast difference between the

firmly established and recognized authority of the United States government in the early twentieth century, and the absence of an international authority capable of enforcing international antitrust legislation. Until there is a recognized international body capable of enforcing such legislation, individual countries are certain to look first to their own economic interests.

Webs of Power may not offer any viable answers to the questions it raises concerning cartel practices, but it is well worth reading. Critics of MNCs will find ample ammunition as will those believing in the need for a strong world government. Even the most dedicated and successful capitalist can find an informative summary of his international competitors. The capitalist may even discover some new ideas on how to benefit from the almost unrestricted international marketplace.

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